

# Whistle Stop



Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society & Museum  
P. O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN. 37605-0432  
(423) 753-5797

[www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org](http://www.wataugavalleyrrhsm.org)



Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage

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*Happy 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary,  
Watauga Valley!*

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## *May 24<sup>th</sup> General Membership Meeting*

Our next General Membership meeting will be held on Monday, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 6:30 pm at the Chuckey Depot / Railroad Museum, 110 South Second St., Jonesborough, TN (at the railroad crossing). The program for May will be a Retired Conductor (Wayne Manning) with the Southern Railway and Norfolk Southern and another Southern/NS guest. Come hear about their stories on the Southern Railway out of Knoxville.

## *Member Notes*

### *By Edna Kay Carter*

Please keep the Ritchie family in your prayers as they deal with their recent loss of George. George was a long-time member of our club and will be truly missed.

Continue to keep Nancy Ritchie, Sharon Slagle, Gary Price, Jack Maloney, Fred Phofl, Lois Tilley and Billy Walker in your thoughts and prayers as they deal with various health concerns. As always, let us know of any member, friend or family to whom a card might be sent, or a phone call made. The office number is 423-753-5797 or call Edna Carter at 423-571-4612.

We have no new members to report currently.

Hope everyone is enjoying the warmer weather and staying safe and healthy.

**May 16<sup>th</sup> GSMR Excursion.** We operated the Spring Excursion on the Great Smoky Mtn Railroad Train Excursion and it was a big success. With over 450 people on the train, everyone had a great time on a beautiful Spring Day. We hope in the near future we can get back to using busses and WATV members can host again. This Spring Trip did not use buses since the Covid Restrictions are still in place.

**Chuckey Depot and Museum.** The next training host session for the Chuckey Depot will be this summer. If you would like to get involved and volunteer at the depot/museum one day a month. Please call the chapter office at 423 753-5797 or email [wataugavalley@gmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@gmail.com) to get your name on the list. We are needing more host since the hours of the depot have been extended.

## *Mechanical Department Report*

### *by Jim Magill and Art DeVoe*



The weather has been good to the Watauga Valley Mechanical Team; there have been a lot of good working days at the yard over the last several weeks. If you would like to help out at the Jonesborough Coach Yard on Tuesdays between 9 am to 5 pm or Saturdays 9 am to 12 noon, please call the WVRHS&M Office at 423-753-5797 or email [wataugavalley@embarqmail.com](mailto:wataugavalley@embarqmail.com).

#### **ROLLING STOCK**

**“Powhatan Arrow” coach (WATX 539):** electrical wiring work being performed.

**“Moultrie” diner (WATX 400) and “Crescent Harbor” sleeper / lounge (WATX 2351):** both cars ready for next assignment.

**“St Augustine” coach (WATX 500):** windows are being replaced.

**“Clinchfield 100” office car (WATX 100):** Major work has been ongoing with the 100. The new air conditioning unit has been installed as well as tables and chairs. Electrical upgrades are being made.

## Happy 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Watauga Valley!

*By Gary Price, WVRHS&M Historian*

It is amazing to see just how far we have come, and it is all thanks to YOU, our past and present members.

In 1979 a group of rail enthusiasts, calling themselves “The Watauga Railfan Club”, met at East Tennessee State University. There were 30 railfans in attendance. The members decided that there needed to be National Railway Historical Society Chapter in Johnson City, Tennessee and on May 1981 the Watauga Valley Chapter NRHS was chartered. The first year boasted 53 members. The mission was to be a non-profit, educational, all volunteer organization dedicated to preserve past, present and future railroading experience of the greater Appalachia area. There are still ten charter members active in the chapter.



Exactly one year later, May 1982, the Chapter sponsored their first public train excursion weekend, utilizing the old ET&WNC trackage from Johnson City to Elizabethton, TN and back.

In 1986, a purchase of an ex-Amtrak Coach on a siding in Bristol became a restoration project for Chapter members. A former lumber siding was leased off the NS A line at MP32.5. The newly restored coach was dubbed the ‘Clinchfield’ in honor of the men and women who served the

railroad with pride. In 1989 a Clinchfield Railroad box car joined our yard as a tool car, followed in 1989 with the purchase of a Chessie System caboose with a special Safety Paint Scheme. This caboose became the official office and ticket booth for the chapter. Looking for another project, in 1989 the Chapter returned to Bristol and purchased an ex-Amtrak diner. After a complete restoration, the car was dubbed “Tennessean” after the famous Southern Train that once serviced the Tri-City area. At this point it was decided to expand the



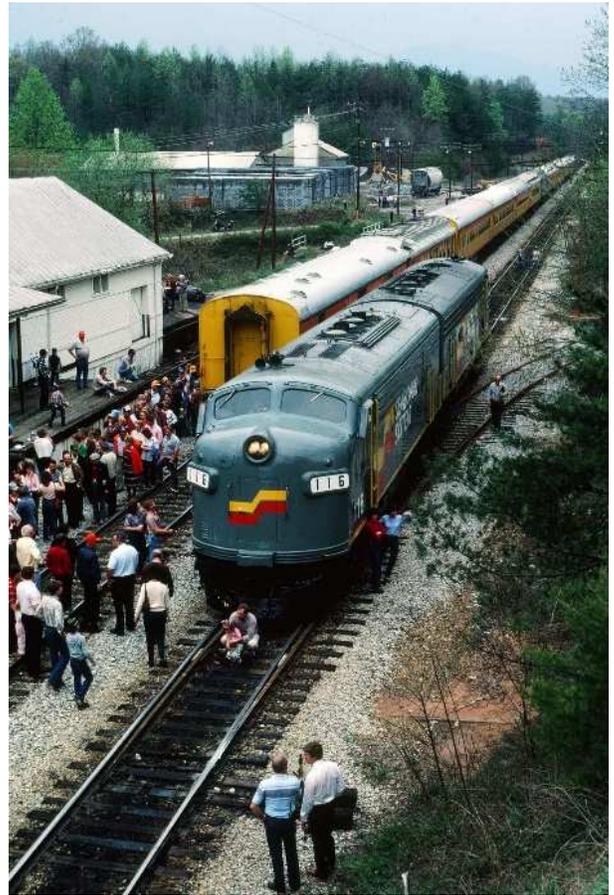
Spring Street yard to two tracks. The yard became affectionately known to the mechanical crew as “The Buzzards Roost”.

In 1991 NS donated to us the former Norfolk and Western “Powhatan Arrow” coach 539. The Chapter’s cars became popular with the riders and is still requested for trips to this day. \*NOTE: WATX 500 coach ‘Clinchfield’ was changed to its historical heritage as Florida East Coast “St. Augustine”, and WATX 400 diner “Tennessean” was restored to its historical Atlantic Coast Line “Moultrie” appearance. The diner was used as a Chapter Christmas/New Year’s dinner for many years.

The Chapter purchased former Southern Railway lounge car “Crescent Harbor” in 2002 and meticulously restored the car to its historical appearance right down to the photos in the galley. It was decided that instead of trying to install a third switch and track, there would just be a “display track” built to set the Chessie Caboose and Clinchfield boxcar on to open more room on the existing two tracks.

In 2005 the Chapter sold a former Virginian Railway caboose and took the money and purchased Southern bay window caboose X450. This caboose was restored and now resides at the Chuckey Depot site.

2013 brought a real surprise as the Chapter was able to acquire Clinchfield Business Car 100. While restoration is still ongoing, the car is already a favorite of members and fans. During this time, it was decided to extend both tracks to accommodate the addition of car 100.



Over the years, the Chapter has boasted an impressive mainline excursion program, selling out tickets for every trip continuously. During the late 1980 and early 1990’s the Chapter hosted an impressive 28 steam excursions with Norfolk Southern Steam Program with fan favorite locomotives like Southern 4501, Norfolk and Western 611 and 1218, Louisville and Nashville 152 and

Savannah and Atlanta 750 along with several diesel excursions and field trips. We even pinch hit for NS when other chapters had cancellations, and we took that date and sold the trip out in record time. Excursions were the

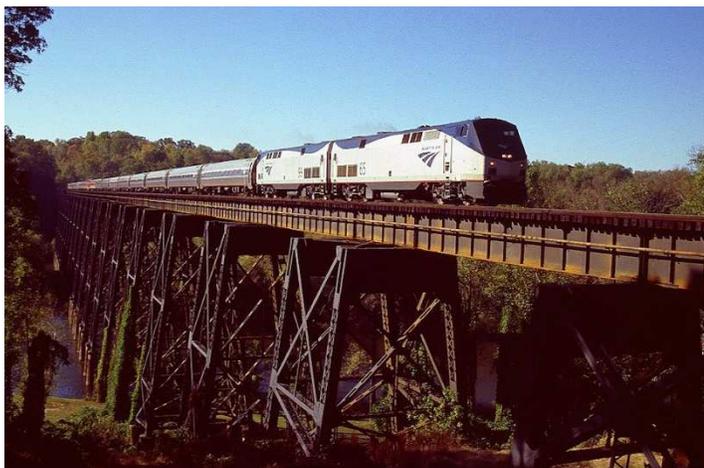
life blood of many organization throughout the East Coast. Sadly, NS announced on October 1994 that all NS sponsored excursions would cease.

October 1995 and 1996 opened the door for a unique opportunity. The Chapter hosted a total of eighteen sold out excursions on the ET railroad from Johnson City to Elizabethton and back. These trips really filled the void from the loss of mainline trips. During the down time, the Board of Directors made the financial decision to start Amtrak certifying of all the Chapter cars. A decision that really paid off because from 1997-1999, Amtrak ran a limited excursion program and



our Chapter was granted trips out of Kingsport to Elkhorn City, and Kingsport to Marion, NC. These trips traversed the old Clinchfield Railroad and were very popular with the fans, CSX even tacked the company office car “New York” on the rear of one of our excursions.

September 2000, we took a one-day diesel powered trip on NS from Bristol to Radford.



During 2001-2006 mainline excursions were silenced for a while as we sponsored several bus trips to short line railroads in TN and NC.

During the years of 2007 to 2017 The Chapter formed a unique partnership with the North Carolina Transportation Museum, Amtrak and NS to operate mainline excursions out of Spencer NC to destinations like Charlottesville, VA, Asheville NC, and Toccoa, GA. Chapter members handled all first-class passengers and dining car services while the NCTM handled coach class and souvenirs.

The Chapter actively worked with NS, hosting trips as part of the company’s 21 Steam Program. Due to a hot bearing on Southern 630 our July 2012 one-way trips from Pulaski to Bristol and Bristol to Knoxville had to be pulled by NS Savannah and Atlanta heritage diesel. Passengers were bused back to their cars. In March 2013 we hosted round trips out of Bristol behind Southern 630. A Saturday trip to Radford and a Sunday trip to Bulls Gap. Chapter members also were

asked to help host on the 630 trips out of Grundy, VA. Those trips were a huge success. Finally on June 26 & 27 the Chapter hosted their final NS excursions behind Southern 4501. One to Radford and one to Bulls Gap, these would be the final mainline trips the Charter has hosted to date. We have an excellent working agreement with the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad and continue to sell out bus to train trips for a day trip in the Smokies.

In 2011 concerns were brought up about rising NRHS dues and questions of how the parent organization was helping us, so it was decided that to be more visible and helpful to the local community, we would spin off another 501c organization. The new name would become the Watauga Valley Railroad Historical Society and Museum. Members were given the opportunity to join the NRHS, RHSM, or both. The family of Lee Alley donated the Chapter his home-built and well-traveled "GHOST TRAIN" truck and trailer along with many steam and diesel whistles, bells and other memorabilia; the chapter leases the truck out at special events so folk can once again hear sounds of a steam train whistle.



In 2017 The chapter joined the town of Jonesborough in opening a museum in the former Chuckey Passenger depot, that had been donated, taken apart board by board, and reassembled on a lot at 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Downtown Jonesborough. The depot currently houses the chapter's restored N&W motorcar, the chapter's Southern 1317 live steam locomotive model, a N&W M-class bell and many other artifacts. The museum hosts many exhibits from chapter members and collectors that rotate every six months with a different rail related theme.

Thanks to the dedication of our members, our future looks bright and we look forward to continuing our mission of "Preserving Our Region's Railroad Heritage".



***Whistle Stop***

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P.O. Box 432, Johnson City, TN 37605-0432

[whistlestop.editor@gmail.com](mailto:whistlestop.editor@gmail.com)

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